CRUEL PUNISHMENT.

SCENES IN CHARLES READE'S NOVEL WERE STRICTLY TRUE.

The Author of "It's Never Too Late to Mend" Described Thrilling Punishments of Prison Life That Really Took Place In an Old English Jail.

What reader of Charles Reade's ever popular novel, "It's Never Too Late to Mend," has not been touched by the intensely thrilling stories of prison life contained in it and felt deep sympathy with the poor sufferers whose terrible experiences are so vividly told? No one, we would assert. The story reads like a highly colored fiction, yet every word of it is absolutely true.

Very few people may be aware that this celebrated book was founded on the cruelties practiced in the Birmingham jail in the years 1854 and 1855. Indeed, the original of the character of Evans, the humanitarian, still lives, and in fact is even now in the service of the prison authorities. He is Mr. William Brown, the chief warden of Winson Green jail, Birmingham, and many times he has been offered a large remuneration to appear on the stage to play the part of himself in an adaptation of Reade's brilliant novel.

His story is indeed a sensational one and forms a wonderful chapter of prison life in the fifties, and also contrasts in a striking manner the treatment of prisoners now adopted.

In 1852 Lieutenant Austin was appointed governor of Winson Green prison. He had formerly been in the navy, and in that service had forced himself to the conclusion that discipline was everything. He took a delight in severe punishment and considered that a breach of prison discipline was a crime almost greater than that for which a prisoner entered a jail. He pinned his faith to constant threats of punishment and an almost perpetual use of those barbarous tortures, the collar, straitjacket, dark cells and crank labor.

It was in 1853 that the public first had their suspicions aroused that cruelties of a gross character were being practiced in the Birmingham jail. In that year a 15-year-old boy committed suicide in order to escape tortuous punishment. The facts that came out at the inquest highly incensed the inhabitants.

It was proved beyond doubt that straitjackets were constantly used as punishment for the smallest offense, such as the inability of a prisoner to fulfill the amount of crank labor set him, or for talking to another prisoner, or for using bad language.

These jackets were provided with perfectly rigid collars 13 inches long, 3½ inches deep and one-quarter inch thick. The prisoner was first muffled in the jacket, with his arms tied together on his breast, and then strapped so tightly at the back that it was impossible to insert a finger between the strap and the flesh. The leather collar was then fastened on in such a manner that it cut the chin and neck and prevented any movement of the head. Then the prisoner was fastened up to the wall of his cell in a standing position. This punishment was terribly painful, and yet it frequently lasted for hours, and on occasions boys of 15 were kept in such positions from 9 o'clock in the morning until 10 at night!

Very often they fainted and were then brought round by a liberal application of water, which was thrown on them from buckets.

The prisoners in this position were fed by a warden, who broke up the bread and placed it in the prisoner's mouth. Sometimes, however, the collar was so tight that a prisoner could not swallow bread or water.

Among the labor boys had to perform was the turning of a crank handle with a 10 pound pressure upon it for 10,000 revolutions between sunrise and night. So many revolutions had to be made before breakfast, so many before dinner, so many before supper. If the required number was not completed before breakfast, no breakfast; if not completed before dinner, no dinner; if not before supper, no supper, so that a weakly man or boy would go a whole day without food, and would think himself lucky if at 10 o'clock at night he got eight ounces of brown bread and a pint of water.

During the whole of the time these abominable cruelties were being practiced, the chaplain and Mr. Brown were doing their utmost to relax the terrible prison discipline adopted by the harsh governor. They worked together with a will, and many, many times have prisoners fallen on their knees in thankfulness for timely succor which had been rendered them.

At length, at the demand of the inhabitants of Birmingham, a royal commission of inquiry was held to inquire into the truth of the allegations. The whole of them were found to be true.

One particularly pitiable case was that of a boy named Edward Andrews, about whom, in the name of Josephus, Reade gives a true and heartrending account. Mr. Brown has a vived recollection of this poor boy. He was sent to jail for three months for stealing four pounds of beef. He was very weak, but was notwithstanding put to the crank.

One day the chaplain, Mr. Sherwin, was attracted to the boy's cell by cries of "Murder!" He found the boy crying piteously, and he said he was being starved. He was in the straitjacket at the time, and the chaplain tried to insert one of his fingers between the collar and the boy's neck, but failed. Mr. Brown happened to be passing at the time, and he slackened the straps on his own responsibility and greatly relieved the little sufferer.

Several times after this the boy was punished by order of Austin, and on many occasions buckets of water were thrown over him. Once Brown found the boy strapped to the wall, and on being released he fell to the ground insensible. On April 27 he put an end to his sufferings by committing suicide in his cell.

Austin was afterward tried at Warwick assizes for his diabolical ill treatment and was sent to jail for three months.

He is now, like the majority of the actors in this dreadful drama, dead, but Mr. Brown still officiates as the chief warder in the prison and takes a most kindly interest in any prisoners who are desirous of reforming themselves.—London Tit-Bits.

Speed of Homing Pigeons.

Thirty or thirty-five miles an hour is a fair average in good weather for a pigeon. The greater the distance, the smaller the probability of the prompt return of the bird. At a distance of, say, 100 miles, almost all birds return safely if the weather is favorable, but at distances of 400 or 500 miles it is impossible to reckon confidently on the bird's return. It appears curious, but it is a well established fact that as the bird nears its home its speed is accelerated.—Philadelphia Press.

Daily Work of a Young Mother.

Mr. Alexander Graham Bell calculates that a mother, in talking to her infant, speaks 35,000 words a day—equal to about four hours of continuous talking, and this notwithstanding the fact that the baby does not know what any single one of the 35,000 words means.—London Tit-Bits.

Baked Lemon For Hoarseness.

A baked lemon is said to be an excellent remedy for hoarseness and one that is often resorted to by singers and public speakers. The lemon is baked like an apple and a little of the heated and thickened juice squeezed over lump sugar.—New York Times.

A Laconic Reply.

Passenger—Can you tell me what are the times for these busses to leave the Swiss cottage?

Driver—Quarter after—'arf after—quarter to—and at!—London Punch.

BEATEN AT HIS OWN GAME.

A Youthful Auditor Tells a Story Bigger Than Uncle Bill Does.

It was great fun for the boys in the village where Uncle Bill lived to get him started telling some of his big stories. Apparently there were no bounds to his imagination and to the number of his tales. Most of them were connected in some way with the Hudson, as he had spent nearly his whole life on the river.

Seated on a stringpiece of the wharf one afternoon with a number of youngsters around him he began by telling his audience what a wonderful river the Hudson was.

"Boys," he said, "I tell yer that 'ere is a mighty fine river. Yer kin go most anywhere yer mind to on her. Yessir, yer kin go to the north pole an ter the south pole."

The boys winked to one another, but did not venture to make any remarks.

"How about Captain Broat's sloop, Uncle Billy?" asked one of his auditors.

"Ah, murmured the old man, "she was a dandy, she was. Why, I've seen that 'ere slo'p, loaded with ore till her deck was flush with ther water, go down through Haverstraw bay under full sail when ther breeze was so stiff that the other boats had two reefs in their mains'ls an their jibs bobbed, and some of 'em with their peaks dropped. We've gone slashin down Haverstraw bay with ole Sary's bow under water more'n half ther time an didn't mind it at all. She was a great slo'p, now, if yer wanter know it."

"How did you like havin the West Point fellers shoot holes through the mainsail, Uncle Bill?" asked an auditor.

"I didn't like it nohow. 'Tain't no use tryin ter fool with them fellers, they're tew everlastin reckalous. One o' them shots purty near took off my whiskers."

"My! Uncle Bill that was a narrer escape," remarked an impudent youngster, with a wink at his grinning companions, "but it ain't narthin to what I had once when I was fightin Injuns out west. One evenin jest about sunset I was going home to the camp when all of a sudden an Injun jumps from behind a bush, and before I could do anything he put up his rifle and fired right at my head. I saw the bullet comin an caught it between my teeth and shook it at him. The Injun gave a yell and run as hard as he could."

There was a howl from the other boys, but Uncle Bill, with a look of deep disgust at being beaten at his own game, exclaimed in tones of great disapproval:

"Ah, you shaller pill, you, what do yer want ter lie to er poor ole man fur?" And he got up and walked slowly away.

Superstitions About Old Girdles.

Girdles were an object of superstition, more especially if they had belonged to female saints. Such girdles were popularly believed to possess a certain remarkable power—the power, namely, of protecting women from some of the more serious illnesses that are attendant or consequent upon childbirth. This superstition permeated through all classes of the sex. Queens credited the miraculous virtues of "our lady's girdle" and paid large prices for the loan of one. The majority of these girdles were believed to have been the property, during her lifetime, of St. Margaret, the gracious patroness of married women. Nearly every nunnery in England—to say nothing of France—possessed one. There is in an old Irish poem, with the charmingly euphonious title of "Oran Eadar Ailte Agus MacRonain Air Dhoibh Fearg a Ghabhail Ri Fionn," an allusion to the efficacy of an enchanted or sanctified girdle in this same direction, and we are further informed that "sickness cannot affect those whom their girdle binds."

In Ossian there is mention made to much the same effect. It does not matter that the poems of Ossian, as put before the world by Mr. Macpherson, are not genuine. One of the schoolmasters' commentators says that "sanctified girdles till very lately were kept in many families in the north of Scotland. They were impressed with several mystical figures, and the ceremony of binding them about the woman's waist was accompanied with words and gestures which showed the custom to have come originally from the Druids."—Chambers' Journal.

Quarters For an Alligator.

The alligator which accompanies home nearly every traveler to Florida and often performs the journey by himself in a box by mail should have both water and dry land so that he can choose for himself where he will abide. I have seen one kept in a tub of water unchanged till it was offensive, and another who had absolutely no access to water at all. Both these treatments were improper and cruel. A good way to make an alligator comfortable, which we are bound to do if we snatch him from his home and deprive him of liberty, is to prepare a large box that will hold water, with a board running up out of the water that he can occupy if he desires. A little pile of rocks, behind or within which he can hide, will be a welcome addition to his quarters. For food, place oysters or cut raw beef where he can get it. He usually prefers to eat in solitude, but his keeper must remove the remains if there be any the next day. The water should be changed often and kept sweet.—Olive Thorne Miller in Harper's Bazar.

Songs of the Roustabouts.

It was a grand sight to the small boys of Lexington to see the deckhands swaggering along one at each end of a coal box and 50 men in line carrying coal to the bunkers of such boats as the E. X. Auberg, James H. Lucas, Polar Star and Clara, and if they were negro hands singing only as negroes can sing, or as they could in those days. The coal was carried aboard at night by the light of the pine knot fire, and the small boy sat around and caught the words of a new song. The boys got their songs in those days from the circus and the steamboats. The "border boys" had but two ambitions—one was to cross the plains and be a "wagon boss," and the other to be a steamboat captain.—St. Louis Letter.

Transplanting Native Shrubs.

The beauty of our native shrubs and their use as flowering ornaments for large lawns becomes more appreciated in each succeeding year. While the cultivation of our native wild flowers is becoming very popular until now it is quite the fashion for all well shaded lawns to have its treasured wild woods garden, some of our handsomest native shrubs are still neglected.

Many of the early flowering varieties may be safely transplanted, and those in bloom now may be marked for transplanting later, after the flowers disappear. Those who live in the country seldom realize their opportunities for home adornment with these shrubs growing wild only a short distance from their barren, uncultivated lawns.—Garden and Forest.

The Grumbler and the Boy.

"Clumsy!" exclaimed the pedestrian when he was struck on the foot by the broom of the shopboy who was sweeping off the sidewalk.

"I don't know about that," replied the boy. "I've swept off this sidewalk every morning for two years. Probably a million persons have passed while I was sweeping, and you are the first one I've hit."

"If you had missed hitting a hundred million, what difference would that make to me?" said the pedestrian as he went off with his mouth full of grumble.—Boston Transcript.

Natural Mistake.

"What a break that was for the minister to say 'dust to dust' when they were married!"

"He probably had in mind that two great fortunes were united by the alliance."—Truth.